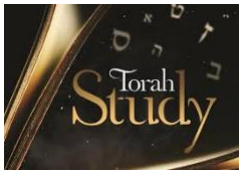
20171105 Genesis 12:1-17:27 "It's All About Grace - ABRAM'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD"



"It's All About Grace - ABRAM'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD"
Series: "Lessons for Living: A Christian Walk through the Torah" by Faber McMullen, Union Grove Baptist Church
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Lech Lecha | לך לך | *"Go forth "*
Torah: Genesis 12:1-17:27

Imagine for a minute that you're leaving on a trip. You really don't know where you're going or how you're going to get there. You only know two things. You know that God told you to go there, and you know that He will be there when you get there. This is the story of Abram. This is the story of his call by God. This is the story of God's marvelous grace to Abram, whom God would later call Abraham: The Father of his people.

Remember for a moment that when God called Abram, he was not a Jew. There was no such thing as "Jewishness" at that time. God simply spoke into the heart of a man who lived in a Chaldean city called "Ur" (which merely means "city"), and for a reason that only God understands he chose THAT man. He chose to reveal himself through Abraham and his descendants that would come after him. Abram wasn't deserving. Abram did not earn this privilege. God merely chose Abraham and made a promise to him. Abraham chose to believe that promise of God, and this pleased God beyond measure, and it was accounted to Abraham as "righteousness" by Almighty God.

Stand with me as we read the beginning of our Torah Portion for today:

12 Now the LORD had said to Abram:

"Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house,
To a land that I will show you.[2] I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.
[3] I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."[4] So Abram departed as the
LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram *was* seventy-five years

old when he departed from Haran.[1]

GRACE IN THE TORAH PORTION - EXAMPLE 1

The first part of our portion is quite straight-forward. God is speaking to this person telling him to leave his father's house. Secondly, he is telling him to go "to a land that I will show you." Thirdly, God is promising to make of him a great nation. Fourthly, God is saying that He will "bless him". Fifthly, He is promising that his name will be "great". Sixthly, He promises that Abram will be a blessing. Seventh, God says that all who bless Abraham will be blessed and those that curse Abraham will be cursed, and that through him "all families of the earth shall be blessed."

Church, what does the text tell us that Abram did to get God to promise all of these things to him? The text tells us that Abram did not do anything to be the recipient of these promises. This is our first glimpse of grace in this Torah portion. God covenanted to Abram that He would do these things for Abram's benefit. Abram responded in obedience. He left his father's house, and he went to a country he did not know. God led him there when he didn't even know how to get where he was going. The only thing he knew is that God would be there when he reached that Promised Land.

GRACE IN THE TORAH PORTION - EXAMPLE II

Our portion then takes us to Abram's lie to the Egyptians in which he says that Sara is his sister and not his wife. We'll save that for another day. And then his brother Lot is captured and Abram effectuates a dramatic rescue. Then we have Abram's encounter with "The Righteous King". We use the name Melchizedek in English, but this is not really a name. It is a title. ***Melek Zedek.*** The question has arisen for 3,000 years as to who this Melchizedek was. Let's look at the text.

Genesis Chapter 14

[8] Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he *was* the priest of God

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[1] *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ge 12:1–4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Most High. [19] And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; [20] And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all.[2]

The writer of the Book of Hebrews explains this passage to us

7 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, [2] to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace," [3] without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.[3]

So with whom is Abraham having an encounter? I believe he is having an encounter with Jesus. Jesus is Priest and King. And who initiates this contact? Does Abram? No. Genesis 14 clearly tells us that Melchizedek brought bread and wine to Abram. It is Melchizedek who initiates the contact. Church, this is the second expression of divine grace we see in this Torah portion this morning. This Christophony (Christ-Appearance) administers bread and wine to Abram, and then Abram submits to the authority of Melchizedek when he pays a tithe to Him. Abram is responsive in paying a tithe not because he is required to do so, but because God put it in his heart. The writer of Hebrews articulates that Melchizedek represents a Royal Priesthood that precedes and preempts the authority bestowed later on Aaron in the establishment of the Aaronic Priesthood.

GRACE IN THE TORAH PORTION - EXAMPLE III

Please turn with me know to Genesis Chapter 15

15 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward."[2] But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?" [3] Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"[4] And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." [5] Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."[6] And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for

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[2] *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ge 14:18–20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
[3] *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Heb 7:1–3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

righteousness.[4]

What is going on here is that God once again appears to Abram in a dream and he reiterates his promise of an heir from Abram's own body. Abram asks whether this heir will be from his maid's child named Eliezer. God tells him that the heir will come from his own body. The text then tells us that God took Abram outside of the tent and He assured him that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens. And then Abram's response exhibits God's required response to grace. Verse 6 tells us that "He [Abram] believed in the Lord, and He [God] accounted it [that belief] to him [Abram] for righteousness. You see guys, it's ALL ABOUT BELIEF IN THE LORD. That was what pleased the Lord. That's the same standard and the same requirement that God puts on mankind today. It is a requirement of belief. Have you believed? Do you believe? Will you believe? If so, God will account that for righteousness.

Let's now look at some details in this third account of grace.

12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold,
horror *and* great darkness fell upon him. 13 Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that
your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and
they will afflict them four hundred years. 14 And also the nation whom they serve I will
judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 Now as for you, you shall
go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 But in the fourth
generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet
complete."17 And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold,
there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.
18 On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying:"To your descendants
I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—
19 the Kenites, the Kenezzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,
21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."[5]

So what is going on in this passage? First God puts Abram in a deep sleep. My dad told me "he put him under anesthesia". He tells him that he will have descendants and they will be servants in a land that is not theirs for 400 years. Where were the Israelites slaves for 400 years? They were slaves in Egypt of course. Move with me down to verse 17. Notice that this covenant ceremony is being performed. Usually in a covenant both sides are making unbreakable promises.

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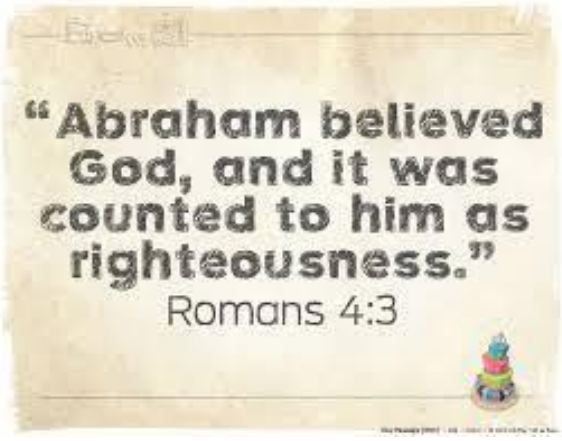
[4] *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ge 15:1–6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
[5] *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ge 15:12–21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

What promise is Abram making? He's not making ANY promise. Abram is in a trance. And it is in that trance that he sees God alone participating in and sealing this promise to Abram. God is in that burning torch that is passing between those pieces. There while looking on in a trance, God is making a covenant promise to Abram to give him all of the land we know today as THE LAND OF ISRAEL.

So you have seen grace today in all of its glory in this Torah portion. First, we saw God give Abram 7 measures of grace as He made specific promises to Abram. What did Abram do to deserve these promises? Nothing However, Abram responded by leaving his father's house and going to a land he did not know without even knowing how he would get there. He only knew that God would be there in that land when Abram reached that land.

Secondly, we saw grace in Abram's encounter with Melchizedek. Melchizedek initiated the relationship by making the first move, bringing bread and wine to Abram. This is a foreshadowing of what we will practice this morning in what is called Holy Communion in some Christian circles. Please note that there is no account of Melchizedek making a sacrifice of any sort as would be the usual custom of a priest. This is because Jesus, the Priest and King, would not perform a sacrifice but would one day be the sacrifice that takes away our sins and the sins of the whole world. Abram responds by showing his submission to Melchizedek giving to him a tenth of all that he had.



And then lastly, the covenant is performed with only one participant. Abram can't participate beyond belief because he is in a deep trance. Yet God makes him conscious enough either in reality or in his dream to go out and look on the stars that are numerous in the heavens. Deep in his heart Abram decided to believe that God is who He says He is and that He'll do what He says He will do. For God, that was enough. That was the requirement. God accounted it to Abram as righteousness.

Friends, things are still all about grace. God came in the form of Jesus. He submitted Himself to be humbled and ultimately killed by men. In a divine exchange that I don't pretend to understand, that Jesus, my Jesus, took His place on a cross for you and for me. The only response required is belief. God does the rest.

The prophet Isaiah says,
"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." Isaiah 53:5

The question today is what is your response? Let us Pray

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868 Tel: 936-825-1227